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Linguistic Variety in Local Commercial Discourse

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Abstract

This study aimed to reveal the linguistic variety incorporated into local commercial discourse in Malaysia. The focus of this study is to determined how the linguistic variety is used in local fashion articles as a marketing strategy to attract the target consumers. This was a qualitative descriptive study. A total of 60 titles of the commercial articles published in 3 famous local fashion magazines namely Remaja (Youth), Keluarga (Family) and Nona (Woman) were gathered to examine the use of the linguistic variety. The findings show a high usage of English in Malay advertisements, the use of syllabic shortening or 'clipping,' and the existence of semantic innovation or new word influences from other languages.

Keywords: Advertisement, youth language, code mixing, linguistic strategies

Introduction

Without doubt, several primary factors such as the advent of information and communication technologies, the emergence of cultural industries, and the multitude of phenomena associated with globalization are responsible for the prolific use of a variety of linguistics in commercial discourse. Since language forms the core of all advertising, Tanaka (1999) asserted that advertisers use rhetorical devices, techniques and strategies to achieve their goals in attracting, engaging and changing the attitude of their target consumers. In line with this statement, one important question is, why modern commercial discourses in a multilingual language setting, such as in Malaysia, chose to use the linguistic variety and not just one standard language, such as conventional advertisements?

One trend is the notable increase in the use of English as a written language, which includes Malaysia's linguistic landscape, which reflects a growing salience of English as a marker of group identity. The change in Malaysia's sociolinguistic context, particularly in advertising, drives this study to reveal the patterns of linguistic variety, with a focus on how the language is used and at the same time exposes the different linguistic strategies employed in Malay commercial discourse.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach. The total of 60 titles of commercial articles published in three popular Malay fashion magazines, namely Remaja [Youth], Keluarga [Family] and Nona [Woman] were collected and analysed. The samples were purposively collected, and the advertisements were then categorized based on the patterns of linguistic variety used.

Result and Discussion

This section describes the language patterns that appear in the data and its sociolinguistic position in the Malaysian context.

The Code-Mixing Used in Malay advertisements

Easy access to the Internet and satellite television in Malaysia exposes the society, especially teenagers and young adults, to extensive worldwide content. This exposure is not limited to just contact with diverse cultures and lifestyles but also to a variety of languages and dialects, hence, leading to the use of mixed codes, funky language, street slang, teen talk, hashtags, and inter alia. In order to stay relevant, advertisers must create advertisements that are more language oriented as it is more effective at communicating added value to potential buyers (Mary Wangui 2013). In addition, the use of code mixing in advertisements, is considered persuasive and a good marketing tool (Shairah Hana Sulaiman, Muhamad Izzat Rahim and Mohamad Hanis Yahaya 2013). Nevertheless, advertisers should also be aware of different needs and perceptions of consumers, in general.

This section shows code-mixing patterns found in local advertisements, from single words to substantial strings of sentences, but with only one language mixing. The Malay language was the dominant language used in advertising in these selected fashion magazines. However, it is evident that English has become the next most frequently used language when delivering messages to target consumers. Although data were from a monolingual Malay language magazine, it was clear that advertisements in it were not monolingual, as almost half of the advertisements were bilingual because it used code-mixing as one of the marketing strategies to attract the interest of target consumers. The Malay language is found in the main body of the text; providing information addressed to target readers of the advertisement. In some cases, English appears at the beginning of the text, and a few more words are inserted in the middle of the sentences in the Malay language. Hence, the data analysis exposed at least five patterns of 'English-words-mixed' in Malay advertisements. English expressions (1) appear at the beginning of the text, (2) are inserted in the centre of the Malay sentences, (3) appear at the beginning and are inserted in the centre of the Malay sentence, (4) appear at the beginning and at the end of the Malay sentence and, (5) appear at the end of the Malay sentence.

All of these advertisements represent innovative strategies in advertising. As suggested by Torkington (2009), since English is not the community's native language, it still appears in most local advertisements, which might symbolize foreign taste, modernity, high social status or globalization. According to the contemporary communicative situation, this is an acceptable phenomenon since English is a common language used by Malaysian youths.

Syllabic Shortening or 'Clipping'

Another variety of a language pattern that appears in local advertisements is syllabic shortening or 'clipping.' Data show that the Malay advertisement is bombarded with the use of syllabic shortening or 'clipping.' The data show various syllabic shortenings, such as jer (sahaja), dah (sudah) and tapi (tetapi). These syllabic shortenings are commonly used in daily conversations by interlocutors, regardless of whether the communicative setting is formal or

informal. However, this kind of syllabic shortening is not acceptable in written texts, such as advertisements. Based on the current linguistic situation in Malaysia, especially in urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor Bahru, the use of common syllabic shortening like this could be an effective approach by advertisers to make their target consumers feel more comfortable and acceptable.

Semantic Innovation and New Words Influenced by Other Languages

Semantic innovation and new words were found in the data. This kind of linguistic variation is normally presented using the 'inverted comma.' Among others, the advertisers used the word 'pancing' (literally: to fish) to explain the correct way to style any particular outfit in order to 'to hook someone.' Furthermore, the word 'fashionista' was also used, which is traditionally related to a devoted follower of fashion. It seems that nowadays, the word 'fashionista' does not only refer to a devoted follower of fashion, but generally includes ordinary teenagers and young adults. Other expressions such as 'comfort woman,' 'girl power,' 'urban fantasy' and 'paha dah macam drumstick' [literally: the thigh looks like a drumstick], are examples of semantic innovations found in the data.

Slang / Non-standard Words

In order to attract the interest of target consumers, the advertiser uses all kinds of strategies, including slang and non-standard words. Data show that the term 'youth language' implies that it is a complete language with its own lexicon and grammar. The data, socio-linguistically, show a new urban advertisement identity with particular characteristic patterns of slang or non-standard words in local advertisements. For example, words like 'korang' [literally: you guys], 'eww,' 'tercacak' [literally: straight and messy] and 'tak keruan' [literally: chaos]. These are slang words and are commonly used in daily conversation. The main purpose of using a linguistic variety in advertising is to attract and engage the attention of potential target consumers, especially the Gen Z. Young people, mainly teenagers and young adults, tend to use a common language when communicating with their peers. Language patterns used by this group are 'slang' and are characterized by the use of distinct vocabularies that eventually become fashionable and serve as markers that indicate in-group belonging (Chambers 2003; Mahdad 2012).

Conclusion

This study had discussed new marketing strategies for Malaysian advertisers. The use of youth language in local commercial discourse is one of the communicative strategies that speakers (in this case advertisers) develop to demonstrate their link as well as to create an intimate relationship with the target group of consumers. There were four patterns of linguistic variety found in selected data; an abundant use of English words or expressions, syllabic shortening or 'clipping,' semantic innovation and non-standard language. All these varieties of language patterns are incorporated in local commercial discourse using a code-mixing style. This approach can be a good marketing strategy with which to attract and engage the interest of target consumers. The linguistic variety incorporated in local commercial discourse was definitely more influential, easily understood and effective.

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